

Nothing, or Almost Nothing, to Report: Early Childhood Educators and Discursive Constructions of Colorblindness

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At first blush, difference(s) appears to be eagerly taken up in early childhood classrooms in many countries. A phrase often heard in early childhood contexts is that “diversity is celebrated.” However, as Abu El-Haj (2006) points out, while the term diversity is meant to invoke elements of human variability, it ‘glosses’ over relationships of power and privilege. Indeed, the approach to difference adopted in early childhood settings usually involves little more than celebrating holidays, foods, and artefacts – leading to what was critiqued over twenty-five years ago as a ‘tourist curriculum’ (Derman-Sparks & the A.B.C. Task Force, 1989). Why not talk about ‘race’? Research in the area of ‘race’ and early childhood educator practices in a number of countries, including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, suggests that teachers of young children may actually reinforce prevailing racial and ethnic stereotypes that foster peer segregation by taking a ‘colorblind’ approach, in other words, not discussing or ‘seeing’ race (Boutte, 2008; Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Castro-Atwater, 2016; Connolly, 1995, 2000; Farago, Sanders, & Gaias, 2015; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; MacNevin & Berman, 2016; Mednick & Ramsey, 2008; Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008). Thus, as Kalin explains, “although colorblind approaches appear to be politically neutral, they actually work to exacerbate racial oppression in schools and society” (as cited in Husband, 2012, p. 365).

In the current qualitative study, we take a discursive approach, and draw on critical race theory (CRT) (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010) and ideas from the theory of colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2009), as we examine how ‘racial incidents’ and the (non-)reporting of racial incidents in child care programs are framed in the interview responses of 11 early childhood educators in Toronto, Canada. In a discursive approach to data analysis, “[t]exts are analysed for the way in which the discourses within them construct people and situations, for arguments used to legitimate particular viewpoints, and for the way in which those viewpoints and arguments are expressed. Analyses are informed by theory” (Bazeley, 2013, p. 219).

At the time of our interviews (2015-2016), the City of Toronto Children’s Services Division required that all licensed child care centres report any ‘racial incidents’ as a “Serious Occurrence.” This requirement had been in place since 1998. None of the 18 participants in our study stated that in their experience any such reporting ever occurred. When a research team member sought clarification from the city, a staff member at Toronto Children’s Services relayed that no Serious Occurrence

Reports had *ever* been filed with Toronto Children’s Services (although a search of the Canadian Legal Information Database, canlii.org, did find one case of a Serious Occurrence report being filed by a child care centre in 2005). Given this finding, we sought to examine more closely the sections of the interviews that focused on racial incidents, the policy around reporting racial incidents, and the (non-) reporting of racial incidents. Our analysis suggests that one of the reasons for the lack of reporting may be that in keeping with colorblind theory and CRT, racial incidents are *minimized* and *negated*. We present excerpts from 11 interviews where such strategies were identified. Our findings have implications for the content of curricula taught in early childhood education programs, for professional development, and for municipal and provincial policy development and reform.

Literature Review

‘Race’: Early Childhood Educator Practices

The claim to ‘not see color’ is the foundation for Bonilla-Silva’s (2009) theory of colorblind racism. This theory captures the idea that racial inequality exists simultaneously in a world that holds on to the idea that race (and racism) is no longer relevant. School settings are no exception. In her ethnographic study of 4th and 5th grade students, teachers, and parents, in a mostly White school, Lewis (2001) found that:

[c]olor-blindness enables all members of the community to avoid confronting the racial realities that surround them, to avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings, and to avoid dealing with racist events (by deracializing them). Moreover, it does all this as it enables people to feel as if they are on righteous racial terrain... (p. 801)

Building on Pollock’s (2004) work on “colormuteness” in a California High School and District, Castagno (2008) examined middle school teachers’ silence regarding students’ comments connected to race, as well as the active silencing of students in two Utah schools. She found that White teachers silenced students by telling them that talking about race was impolite, “[t]he assumptions being made are that talking about race makes one racist and that not talking about race makes it go away” (p. 325). This is not surprising given that White educators often fail to recognize the impact of their own Whiteness and mistakenly believe their classroom is a neutral, culture-free environment (Han, 2013). However, by not talking about race in the classroom, or by not allowing talk about race in the classroom, teachers send a message that the dominant culture is ‘correct,’ and that different races, ethnicities, and cultural values are ‘wrong.’

There are numerous studies with older children and teachers of older children that explore these issues (e.g., Cooper Stoll, 2014; Neville, Gallardo, & Wing Sue, 2016; Schofield, 1986; 2007; Walton et al., 2014). As Farago et al. (2015) point out, there is less research on early childhood educators’ classroom practices related to discussions of race, and confronting issues of racism in general. In one of the few Canadian studies conducted in this area, Bernhard et al. (1998) explored the relationships between early childhood educators and families in ethnically diverse early childhood education settings in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. They found that 46% of the early childhood educators (ECEs), “reported they had never, during their ECE careers, seen what they would describe as a racial or discriminatory incident between children. Further, they thought such incidents were unlikely, if not impossible, in this age group (three to six)” (p. 18). Early childhood educators who acknowledged the occurrence of racial incidents, reported situations that consisted of verbal behaviour, avoidance or exclusion of racialized children, and attribution of stereotyped roles. The most common response on the part of the ECE was to discuss the incident with the children involved. It is worth noting that the parents in this study tended to believe that educators did not address racial incidents appropriately, that

incidents of subtle and structural racism were ignored, and racialized¹ parents believed that complaining would have negative repercussions for their child.

Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff (2008) explored early childhood educators' responses to children's racialized dialogue in the province of British Columbia. The researchers indicated that ECEs' responses generally focused on conflict resolution strategies and "appropriate dialogue" based on developmental theory and multiculturalist approaches which do not address issues of racism or bias (as discussed at the outset of this paper). The researchers argue that such approaches may limit opportunities for children to develop a better understanding of racism. The authors recommend that early years educators question their biases and assumptions about what children understand about racialization, in other words, not to be bound by strict developmentalist assumptions about what children can know and understand and when. They highlight the importance of educators developing active listening skills and the ability to discuss issues of race and racialization with children in order to develop socially just environments.

Researchers report that educators who (implicitly or explicitly) take a colorblind approach or engage in color-muteness (Castagno, 2008; Pollock, 2004) do so for a number of reasons: an educator's own discomfort; the inaccurate belief that the children are 'too young' to understand race and racism; the belief that it is the parents' responsibility to teach children about race and racial bias; the belief that there is not enough time to devote to these issues; a lack of knowledge and/or unfamiliarity with available resources; and/or the belief that seeing and naming race makes one a racist (Bernhard et al., 1998; Boutte, 2008; Boutte, Lopez-Robertson, & Powers-Costello, 2011; Castagno, 2008; Connolly, 1995; Copenhaver-Johnson, 2006; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2005; Husband, 2010, 2012; Vittrup, 2016). Farago et al. (2015) also point out that some White early childhood educators may not view race and racism as important concerns in today's society. This last point is particularly salient in the Canadian context where the dominant discourse of Canada as a 'tolerant society' holds sway. In fact, Stewart (2009) describes color-blindness as the Canadian condition. At the same time, naming race or racism may leave racialized educators in a bind as mentioning racist practices results in them being regarded as a troublemaker or simply "playing the race card" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2002, p. 195). Kincheloe and Steinberg (2002) refer to this as 'crypto-racism,' a form of double-speak that renders any mention of the word race or racism as a manifestation of racism itself.

These findings speak to the need for pre-service educator and professional development training in the area of anti-racism and/or anti-bias approaches (Derman-Sparks, 1989; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 1985; Dunn, Kirova, Cooley, & Ogilvie, 2009; Han, 2013; Husband, 2010; MacNevin & Berman, 2016; MacNaughton & Davis, 2009; MacNaughton, & Hughes, 2007; Milner, 2010; Schoorman, 2011). MacNaughton and Davis (2009) explain that anti-racist pedagogies involve teaching and learning to challenge racism (also see Dei, 2003). In our study, we asked participants if they felt prepared during their education or since entering the field to discuss race or challenge issues of racism. The majority of the 18 participants in our study, most of whom were White, and had been in the field for twenty or more years, felt unprepared and wanted more training in this area. This issue is addressed further in the implications and conclusions section of this article.

¹ Racialization can be defined as the process by which various groups are differently organized within a social order and are differently valued within hierarchies of power. In other words, the meaning of 'race' is not fixed; it is related to a particular historical, social, and geographic context (Dei, 1996).

‘Race’: Child Care Centres in Toronto, Ontario

The 600 licensed child care centres that have a service contract with the City of Toronto, are regulated both by the provincial and municipal (city) government and must follow operating criteria laid out by both levels of government. What is important for our purposes, is that the city’s operational criteria were revised in the late 1990s to include four new articles on anti-racism, including the requirement that all licensed child care programs in the City of Toronto report any ‘racial incident,’ considered a “Serious Occurrence,” to the city’s Children’s Services Division within 24 hours. Further, the organization was expected to create and implement, “an anti-racism policy that includes procedural guidelines for responding to racial incidents [which] will assist child care programs in their efforts to identify, address, and prevent racial and ethno-cultural bias, harassment, and discriminatory behaviour” (Toronto Children’s Services, 1998, p. 6). In keeping with this requirement, the child care centres included in our study developed centre-based anti-racist policies, which are available on their websites. In some of the centres participants were required to review the guidelines once a year; in other centres this was not the case.

Although the centres that partook in our study were compliant with the city’s operational criteria regarding the creation of anti-racist policies, more recent policy and legislative documents created by the municipal and provincial government send an implicit, if not explicit, message that such an approach is no longer a priority (City of Toronto, 2014; Government of Ontario, 2007; 2014a; 2014b). Indeed, the Ministry of Education has recently taken over the licensing of the city’s 600 child care centres and the requirement to report a racial incident as a “Serious Occurrence” now simply no longer appears (Government of Ontario, 2016). This disappearance is addressed further in the implications and conclusions section of this article. As stated previously, at the time of this study such reporting was still a requirement and thus a question regarding the reporting of racial incidents was included in our semi-structured interviews with participants. Also, as stated previously, our participants either claimed to have never seen a racial incident, or if they had, explained why nothing was reported.

Methods

Research Question

We considered the following question in this paper: What are the discourses advanced by early childhood educators in connection to questions about ‘racial incidents’ and the reporting of ‘racial incidents’ as required by the City of Toronto Children’s Services Division?

Sample

The 18 early childhood educators who volunteered for our study were asked to fill out a demographic form with 11 questions. Participants were asked to self-identify, not select a pre-determined category in regard to gender, race, ethnicity, and nationality. Of these 11 participants, seven identified as White, one identified as mixed, one did not identify their race but identified their ethnicity as Hispanic, another identified as Italian, and one identified as Black. The children they worked with ranged in age from infancy to age six and were from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds. The participants’ ages ranged from 25-53 with the majority in the 40-50 range. They held positions that ranged from centre supervisors, to classroom teachers, to administrators.

Data Collection

The interviews we conducted with early childhood educators ranged from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours and focused on a number of areas, including professional development opportunities and pre-service education around anti-racist practice, whether and how children see ‘race,’ how children play with various ‘diverse’ materials (e.g. toys,

dolls) in the classroom and so forth (see MacNevin & Berman, 2016). For the purposes of this article, we focus on the responses to questions about ‘racial incidents,’ on the anti-racism policy developed by the centres as required by the City of Toronto Children Services Division in the late 1990s, and on the reporting protocol around ‘racial incidents’ also required by the city. The interviewer explained to participants that it was not the goal of the researchers to find out whether or not the policy had been followed correctly, but rather, to hear what the participants had to say about racial incidents and the use of the policy. The policy was on hand at the interview if the interviewees wanted to view it (with the exception of one interview).

Approach to Data Analysis

Discourse analysis is described as the “study of language-in-use” (Gee, 2014, p. 8). The focus in critical discourse analysis is on examining how discourse preserves or challenges power relations. Silver, Berman, and Wilson (2005), taking a Foucauldian approach to power, assert “the key to understanding power is not only to locate it in groups and social structure, but to understand the local practices through which power is exercised and sustained” (p. 20-21). Our goal in the analysis is to consider what is being accomplished *in the discourse*, and in keeping with critical discourse analytic approaches, who benefits from the use of certain discourses, and who is disadvantaged. More specifically, the sections in the interview transcripts where participants were asked about their centre’s anti-racism policy and about the reporting of racial incidents were reviewed and analyzed through the lens of colorblind theory and critical race theory (CRT).

A key feature of CRT, which originated in legal studies in the United States and has since been taken up in education studies mostly in the U.S., is that it works toward “exposing everyday, unexamined racist assumptions that permeate our lives” (Brown, Souto-Manning, & Laman, 2010, p. 514). According to CRT, racism is about more than obvious or glaring acts of race hatred, that in fact racism is so entrenched in our society that it is not immediately visible (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010). CRT also challenges the taken-for-granted and often invisible privilege connected with Whiteness, with the ultimate goal of societal transformation (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010). As we read and re-read the accounts, we attended to the way language was used in responses to the questions, to what was the language doing, and to how arguments were being constructed (Wood & Kroeger, 2000). In sum, the purpose of this analysis is to examine language to better understand how racial incidents, the dismissal of racial incidents, and the lack of reporting are constructed through language.

Analysis and Interpretation

The discursive strategies that we found in the responses to the aforementioned interview questions include *minimizing* and *negating*. Although these particular patterns of responding were not seen amongst all of the participants, the pattern was very distinct amongst 10 of those who were interviewed, and therefore we chose to focus on the patterns identified in these accounts. We also include one account where the speaker constructs how minimizing and negating take place in the early childhood sector. The names used in the excerpts are pseudonyms.

Minimizing Racial Incidents

In the first three excerpts that follow, it appears racial incidents were seen, but not reported.

Interviewer: So, have you had to file, ever, an incident report [in the last 10 years]?

Pat: Um no, it’s just that one thing that the child said, and that was before this policy came into effect.

In this excerpt the language used minimizes the racial incident; “it’s just that *one* thing...”. The implication of this statement is that it cannot really be that bad if it was only one thing that was said. Recognizing that an incident did occur, there is an explanation as to why the incident was not reported. Arguing that the policy was not yet in effect is an effective strategy as it serves to absolve the speaker from any responsibility for raising it with the supervisor. While the policy was in place in what would have been 2005, it was not the role of the interviewer to identify that the participant and the child care agency had in effect contravened the existing policy.

According to another participant:

Connie: I can't recollect any particular one. Um, what happens if it does? It's just really having a conversation. And then recording it. Letting (supervisor) know. So that then she can have a conversation about it. And then that's usually how it goes. There's kind of a procedure, right? Goes up to management. If, if it can't be resolved on the floor then we move it to (the supervisor's name) or (assistant supervisor's name), whoever's here. And then, you know, it may go up as high as (the program manager's name). And hopefully it's way resolved before that ever happens (laughs).

In this account, Connie does not say that no racial incident has ever happened, just that she cannot “recollect any particular one.” This comment serves to acknowledge that such incidents may happen, but minimizes the impact of such occurrences—nothing really stands out, so they cannot be that bad. The account also demonstrates that there is a procedure in place and the speaker knows what it is. By stating, “And then that's usually how it goes,” this implies that the process has been followed based on the chain of command. Thus, the indication is that there may have been a racial incident, however, the response was so vague that perhaps nothing had happened at all. In addition to the minimizing that occurred, there is some hint that perhaps something has happened, yet it is ambiguous, which is another way of minimizing. In the account that follows, a racial incident occurred, but was not reported.

Interviewer: Do you remember if anybody used the Anti-Racism policy for that [racial incident]?

Laura: No. It, it was just kind of like um, in the moment and I tried to deal with it myself as best as I could.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Laura: Unless I felt that I needed support. But then looking back I would have def- definitely dealt with it a lot better.

Interviewer: Are you aware what you would need to do according to the policy? In terms of if there's an incident around discrimination?

Laura: Um, to be honest, I, I, I don't. Like because it's like my first time.

In this excerpt, a situation is constructed where the speaker is caught off guard by the racist event. It came out of the blue and was unexpected. Being caught off guard, along with being new, explain the lack of knowledge around the policy. This construction serves to minimize the occurrence of racism in early childhood settings. It's so unusual and unexpected, one can be caught off guard. It also speaks to the lack of training and education.

Negating the Possibility of Racial Incidents

In the four accounts that follow, the speakers state that they have not witnessed any racial incidents in their child care centre, although the responses are rather curious for reasons that will be discussed.

Alina: No. I've never had it with children, no.
Interviewer: Ok. Have you ever witnessed a parent or a caregiver or anybody have something negative said to them because of their race?
Alina: To each other?
Interviewer: Yes.
Alina: No, I didn't.

By stating "I've never had it with children" the implication is that Alina may have witnessed something with adults. However, when the interviewer asks, the participant seems surprised or confused: "To each other?" When that is confirmed, the answer is "no." Additionally, the use of the word "it" in place of the phrase 'racial incident' or racism serves to make the notion of racism invisible; a form of colorblindness.

Interviewer: Ok. So then, and have you seen a situation where it got to the point where it needed to be reported, or?
Christine: Regarding, um?
Interviewer: Any kind of racist incident.
Christine: Racist? No.

When asked about reporting, the participant's language conveys confusion. When the issue is clarified, the response by Christine is one where racism is played down as she responds "Racist?" This is a curious response given the fact that the focus of the interview has been about race, racism, and racial incidents. The need for clarification and the "surprised" response also serve to minimize racism so that it almost appears irrelevant. In the excerpt that follows, Rose's negative response is also not straightforward.

Interviewer: Ok. So the next question is asking you have you ever had circumstances where a child has had something negative said to them about their race?
Rose: Something negative said to them about their race? Hmm....
And do you want it from my current position or can it be from...?
Interviewer: It can be from any previous positions. Just in your experience as an ECE.
Rose: My experiences as an ECE. Mmm, I would have to say, no.

The way the response is constructed, there seems to be a hint that something has occurred in a previous position. But in the end, the speaker backs away from claiming this; perhaps something happened but not in her experiences as an ECE. Her account seems to dance around the topic, but in the end the answer is "no." In Alice's account that follows, once again the initial "no" is not absolute.

Interviewer: ...the question basically is have you ever, like in fourteen years, had to file a report based on a racial incident?
Alice: Not myself, no.
Interviewer: Mm hmm. Have you ever witnessed another colleague have to file one?
Alice: No.

The interviewer picks up on Alice's hedge and inquires about the possibility of another colleague filing a racial incident report. The answer is "no." In the next account, Janet provides a clear "no" to the question. When probed she provides her reasons why this is the case.

Interviewer: Uh, have you ever had to file a report based on a racial incident, and if yes, can you in general terms tell us about this?

Janet: No. I haven't.

Interviewer: ...And what are your thoughts about the anti-discrimination policy and the guidelines for handling uh, racial incidents?

Janet: Well I think [organization name] is very well equipped. Right? So I don't um, you know what, I haven't given it a great deal of thought, to be honest with you because I haven't encountered the situation.

Again, the occurrence of racism continues to be negated. In Alina's and Christine's brief accounts, we see the educators appearing not to understand the question. In Janet's account, as well as Laura's, there was a clear lack of familiarity with the policies as evidenced by their explanations. Their claims that they never had to report an incident would explain their lack of knowledge regarding the policies. There was never a reason to be familiar with the policy based on the assumption that racial incidences never happened. Rose and Alice hint at something, but then appear to back away. All these accounts reinforce the colorblind beliefs held by many early childhood educators as they construct racial incidents as something that are highly unlikely, if ever, to occur. We see in these excerpts there is a tendency on the part of the speakers to deny the possibility of racism because for many people today understandings of racism are based on very graphic representations of racial dynamics, as CRT makes clear (Gillborn & Ladson- Billings, 2010).

Witnessing Minimizing and Negating

The account that follows differs from the previous accounts in that this account outlines a number of ways that minimizing and negating happen.

Pamela: But sometimes people say, 'Well oh, you know, people are all the same.' A lot of minimizing, a lot of negating, a lot of... there are a lot of people that don't know how to navigate. And I've had to kind of keep in mind that, you know, if you're going to coach people you have to make sure that you don't overwhelm them, and support them where they seem to be. But yeah, I've, I have reacted to some of the responses, you know. Around people's lack of awareness, around what could they do to make it better, or what could they do, in fact, to make it worse. Some of the solutions, people don't even include going back to the child. It's all around dancing around it, or trying to minimize it, say- Some people say you know, 'I'd go and I'd have to go see for myself and if I saw it then I would address it.' And it's like, no! And if someone came and said someone punched you in the face, would you go back to the room and see if the person punched you in the face again? And then if you didn't see it, and it would depend on how you thought it went. Like if a child reports that something happened, you know, you do want to go and observe but you want to go and observe to be proactive, not to qualify and confirm...And there's a lot of misunderstanding of what to do. That, that's a bit of a frustration for me. But I think the [centre's] policy does help cause it's a bona fide way to say that [centre] has a commitment, and nothing changes unless people have a policy.

Building on the above account, one of the added challenges with addressing racism is the fact that there are no visible scars left behind. If a child is hit or bitten or punched, there is usually some form of evidence, or the victim may be crying, an indication that "something" has happened. When children engage in racist behavior, for the most part, there is no hitting, there is nothing being thrown. For the children who are the victims, they may be unable to articulate what has happened but they are often aware that what was said to them did not "feel" right.

When the adults in the classroom do not have the ability to recognize or to name racism, or the commitment to challenge it, early childhood environments are created that reproduce the oppressor/oppressed binary while simultaneously normalize racism. Therefore, early childhood classrooms become one of the earliest spaces where children learn that racism is an acceptable form of social interaction. It is important to note moreover that the experience of racism has been shown to result in significant emotional and psychological trauma, which can impact a person's self-esteem (Paradies, 2006).

The following account exemplifies this lack of visible scars.

Barbara: Yeah, like I don't, I don't know if it's necessarily intentional, but like there might be small things like you know, the person may not have included the child in an activity or you know, included the child in a um diaper change, or um, you know like little um, I'm going to say daily routine things, but that's not really, that's not really what it really is. Um there's just things that are, like I'm not saying she's going to ignore the child, but it's, it won't be the same as the other children. Does that make sense?

In Barbara's account, she isn't sure if what she sees is "intentional," a form of minimizing; what she sees are "small things," which is also a form of minimizing. But she does see something that is not quite right, and she does provide particular, concrete examples, examples that a child, and other children, may see or sense. According to Pachter, Salacha, Bernstein, and Garcia Coll (2010), children's perception and experience of racism can be a source of stress that can impact their health and well-being. In the account, the speaker is aware that something is wrong about the way in which the children are being treated, yet she cannot quite put her finger on what it is exactly and her hesitation to name it comes through. This example speaks to the difficulty of understanding what specifically constitutes racism, which then impacts one's willingness to report, or even know what can and should be reported. What further complicates the situation is whether the issue of intentionality needs to be taken into consideration. Further to this, how might Barbara be supported if she tried to raise this at her place of employment? Staff members who are aware of racism, but experience marginalization in their attempts to address the issue or are unsure how to name it, are silenced into accepting the status quo. In other words, the willingness of early childhood educators to address issues of racism can be circumscribed by the limited supports that are in place to challenge racism in their workplaces.

The final account included in this paper hints that there may be an ongoing racial incident occurring, but the speaker seems hesitant to make that attribution and minimizes the possibility.

Interviewer: So, in your role as supervisor, have you ever um, had an experience with staff where something negative has been said to them? Like, for the staff? Like, from the teacher perspective? Um, has a child ever said anything negative about a staff? About their, their race? That you've seen?

Elaine: (Long pause). I don't know because (sighs) -- we have a, we have an issue right now at [name of centre] but I don't think it's a racial issue...I don't really know (laughs) what it is. I think it's maybe just a preference. Because we have two staff in the toddler room, and there's one little child, and it's the dad. Well, he's feeding off the son. But when the one staff is on early shift, he keeps telling her that he doesn't like her. So he doesn't want to stay because he doesn't like her.

Interviewer: Mm-hmm.

Elaine: Um, but again, I don't think it's racial. It's just his personal feeling.

In this account, the speaker does consider that race may be playing a role in the child's statements to the staff as when a particular staff member is on duty "he keeps telling her that he doesn't like her. So he doesn't want to stay..." What role the father plays is not clear, but something is hinted at. But then the role of race is downplayed, minimized, as she notes twice that she doesn't think it's a racial issue. It may be a "preference" or his "personal feeling." If there was openness about race and racial differences at this centre--if early childhood staff felt comfortable talking about race--this could be discussed with the child, the dad, and the staff. However, as we argue in this paper via CRT and colorblind theory, White privilege works against seeing race and racism and leads to the minimization and negation of such incidents. This inability to acknowledge or to see racism reinforces the contention that problematic interactions and behaviors are based on "anything but racism" (Harper, 2012, p. 16). Rather than individual intentionality, the focus needs to be on anti-racist practice and policy.

Implications and Conclusions

In the process of conducting our study, we learned that no racism-related "Serious Occurrence" has ever been reported to the City of Toronto (save one, as noted earlier). Thus, the lack of such reporting by the participants in our study is not anomalous. We have demonstrated in our analysis how racial incidents get minimized and negated in the talk of early childhood educators. As stated at the outset of this paper, our findings have implications for the content of curricula taught in early childhood education programs, for professional development, and for provincial and municipal policy development and reform.

Recently in the province of Ontario there have been calls to return to recommendations made in the 1990s for the inclusion of anti-racist approaches in the publicly funded and provincially controlled school system (Kindergarten to grade 12) (Pascal, 2016). It is also imperative that members of racialized groups be given quality education and positive educational experiences prior to entering the formal school system. One place this could happen is in licenced child care centres, which are now under the purview of the provincial government. Licenced child care centres are required to hire Registered Early Childhood Educators who have either two-year diplomas or four-year Bachelor of Arts degrees. Thus, such programs need to effectively embed race, racism, and the reality of racialization as central components of the programming, and need to teach anti-racist curriculum (Janmohamed, 2005). Professional development opportunities offered by various organizations and institutions in the province also need to provide anti-racism training so that practitioners in the field who hold colorblind ideas are challenged and supported in gaining new awareness.

Offering this kind of education and training needs to be done thoughtfully. For one, both pre-service educator training and professional development training have tended to take an additive approach to teaching about difference, offering standalone courses, and one-off workshops. This approach fails to expose, disrupt, or challenge the entrenched White-European curriculum. Dunn et al. (2009) assert that the additive approach may alter expressed beliefs about cultural diversity, but is ineffective at producing changes in practice. MacNaughton and Hughes (2007) suggest that standalone courses in diversity education may even increase ECEs' ambivalence toward implementing anti-racist curricula. Therefore, exposure to anti-racist curricula should be sustained, ideally beginning in the earliest grades, but at the very least no later than the beginning of pre-service educator training (Han, 2013). It should also be infused throughout the pre-service curriculum (Dunn et al., 2009; Milner, 2010). Teacher educators must also take an activist role so that their students can assume this stance when they enter early childhood practice (Schoorman, 2011). It is also important to note that racialized faculty may face strong resistance from White students who do not accept the existence of systemic racism (Han, 2013). All student educators should be given field experience in diverse settings (Dunn et al., 2009). This is particularly important for White students who may have little personal experience with racialized populations (Han, 2013).

In addition to the incorporation of anti-racist curricula in pre-service education and professional development, centre based policies need to explicitly define and provide examples of acts of racism. The City of Toronto (1998) provides a number of examples to help educators working in child care to recognize and define racial incidents. For example, they describe certain types of verbal, physical, exclusionary, or avoidant behaviour, and types of written material. They also include inaction/passive behaviour, which they define as “not taking an incident seriously, and not acting to resolve an incident. Dismissing an incident as unintentional or too trivial” (p. 9). Provincial and municipal policies and guidelines also need to explicitly name and address race and racism. For example, the provincial document *How Does Learning Happen?* (Government of Ontario, 2014b) currently includes self-reflection questions for educators to use as professional development tools, and while these questions touch on diversity and inclusion, they do not explicitly name race and racism. The use of non-specific language in policy and professional development materials allows educators to continue to both minimize and ignore racist incidents (see MacNevin & Berman, 2016). All of these factors need to be addressed in order to move us away from the minimization and negation of racial incidents in early childhood settings.

Finally, we recommend that the provincial government revisit the requirement to report incidents of racism as “Serious Occurrences,” which, as noted earlier, was implemented in 1998 and recently removed from policy without explanation. While we recognize that the policy was instituted in good faith, it clearly did not serve to reduce racist incidents or increase awareness. In fact, the requirement to publicly post highly stigmatizing “Serious Occurrence” reports for all current and potential clients to see was likely a strong disincentive to acknowledge incidents of racism, as child care centres rely on parent fees and full enrolment to remain operational. Furthermore, grouping racist incidents with other “Serious Occurrences,” such as fire or death of a child, sent the implicit message that such incidents were highly unlikely to occur. Coupled with the privilege afforded White educators to not ‘see’ racism, the “Serious Occurrence” reporting policy contributed to the ongoing negation and minimization of racist incidents in early childhood settings. We therefore support the recent move to abolish this policy, but are troubled by the lack of accountability that exists with no requirement in place to acknowledge incidents of racism. We recommend that some form of documentation be required in order to ensure that educators name and, more importantly, respond to incidents of racism. To avoid the stigma of a publicly posted report, we suggest such documentation be shared only with the parents of children involved and with staff members. Crucially, the aforementioned changes to pre-service training, professional development, and government policies and guidelines, and centre-based policies, must be implemented to support educators in identifying, acknowledging, and responding to racist incidents in the early childhood classroom. Otherwise, we will continue to hear that there was nothing to report.

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